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WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
September 21, 1993.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Congressional Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters

September 22, 1993

The President. Ladies and gentlemen, I want to say, in the presence here of the press, this is the last meeting I will have a chance to have with the large bipartisan leadership in Congress on health care issues. But I do want to say a profound word of thanks on behalf of not only myself but the entire administration for the work that has been done by people in both parties in the Congress since the first bipartisan leadership meeting I had on January 26th, when I asked that people be designated to work with us from both parties on this health care issue.

I'm not sure that any consultative process like this has ever been carried out before where there's been so much common work, not only between and among ourselves but also with people in the country who are interested in this issue. We have met with over 1,100 groups, with literally thousands of doctors, nurses, and other affected folks in this process. But the most important thing to me has been the spirit of genuine searching and determination that I have seen from leaders in both parties on this issue.

I just want to say, as I prepare to give this speech tonight, how much I appreciate that and how much I look forward to continuing that process in the weeks and months ahead. I'm very grateful to you, and we're going to talk for about an hour here, and then the Senate has to go make a vote, I think. But we're going to have a chance to talk about health care one more time before I speak tonight.

Health Care Reform

Q. Mr. President, you're about to start something tonight that has been tried and failed several times in recent years. Why is this—

The President. Throughout the whole century. Q. Throughout the whole century. Why is this different?

The President. Well, I think, you know, if you go back and look at the history of health care, I think there are two things that are different. One is, there is almost unanimous consensus that the cost of continuing on the present course is greater than the cost of change. With health care costs rising at more than twice the rate of inflation and rising much faster than that for small businesses, with more people losing their coverage every month so that we're paying more for less health care, with the range of choices available for Americans dropping dramatically and the administrative cost to the system escalating at a breathtaking rate, that the cost of going on is greater than the cost of change. I don't think that there has ever been that much consensus before.

The second thing is, I think you've got all of the people trying to work together now. If you go back through the whole history of the 20th century, you can find times when Republicans wanted to do something about health care and Democrats didn't, some when Presidents wanted to do something and the Congress didn't. There's one example when, early in this century, when the American Medical Association wanted to have a national health care bill and the labor movement didn't.

I mean, these things have been flip-flopped. If you read the history of health care, it's like people, you know, passing each other in the night. And I think now you've finally got everybody in the country focused on it. So I think we have a moment in history when we can seize it and move forward if we can maintain this determination to stay in touch with the real problems of our people and with this sort of spirit that we have now of working together.

Taxes

Q. Can you tell us what the sin taxes are going to be for people to help pay for this?

The President. Tonight.

Q. [*Inaudible*]*—tell us tonight—[inaudible]—*an hour and a half.

Q. Are you purposely avoiding that topic today?

The President. No, no. Lord, no.

Q. Are you concerned about the story tomorrow—

The President. No. There will be less than you think, I'll say that.

Russia

Q. Mr. President, do you have anything on the situation in Russia? Are you more reassured now than yesterday?

The President. Well, the situation is calm, and I am hopeful. You know what my position is on it, and I still think the United States has

to be on the side of reform and democracy in Russia, and President Yeltsin represents that. But I know nothing more today than I knew last night when we talked, except that I've obviously gotten my morning briefing, and the situation is calm, and we're hopeful.

Q. Are you trying to contact world leaders, sir, to encourage them to come out in support of him as well?

The President. I called Mr. Kohl last night, and we communicated in other ways with Prime Minister Major and President Mitterrand, Prime Minister Balladur in France, and others. I noted that Prime Minister Major came out today in support, and I know Chancellor Kohl issued a statement yesterday. So I very much appreciate that.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11 a.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House.

Address to a Joint Session of the Congress on Health Care Reform September 22, 1993

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, Members of Congress, distinguished guests, my fellow Americans, before I begin my words tonight I would like to ask that we all bow in a moment of silent prayer for the memory of those who were killed and those who have been injured in the tragic train accident in Alabama today.

Amen.

My fellow Americans, tonight we come together to write a new chapter in the American story. Our forebears enshrined the American dream: life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness. Every generation of Americans has worked to strengthen that legacy, to make our country a place of freedom and opportunity, a place where people who work hard can rise to their full potential, a place where their children can have a better future.

From the settling of the frontier to the landing on the Moon, ours has been a continuous story of challenges defined, obstacles overcome, new horizons secured. That is what makes America what it is and Americans what we are. Now we are in a time of profound change and opportunity. The end of the cold war, the infor-

mation age, the global economy have brought us both opportunity and hope and strife and uncertainty. Our purpose in this dynamic age must be to make change our friend and not our enemy.

To achieve that goal, we must face all our challenges with confidence, with faith, and with discipline, whether we're reducing the deficit, creating tomorrow's jobs and training our people to fill them, converting from a high-tech defense to a high-tech domestic economy, expanding trade, reinventing Government, making our streets safer, or rewarding work over idleness. All these challenges require us to change.

If Americans are to have the courage to change in a difficult time, we must first be secure in our most basic needs. Tonight I want to talk to you about the most critical thing we can do to build that security. This health care system of ours is badly broken, and it is time to fix it. Despite the dedication of literally millions of talented health care professionals, our health care is too uncertain and too expensive, too bureaucratic and too wasteful. It has too much fraud and too much greed.